2. Sexual Life between Maturity and Marriage

After reaching maturity, the girl is called ngôn III, and the young man nkûm I; for both there is also the term bandman, plural of ndîman = young man or girl at the age of being in love. Thus the name itself shows under what sign the subsequent period of life is lived. Free love in the boldest sense of the word prevails. The girl may give away her favors without inhibition to whom and whenever she desires to do so, and she need only observe the religious rule that prohibits sexual intercourse during the day and the social rule that prohibits intercourse between blood relatives. Otherwise there is no barrier; members of the same age group come together and make thorough use of their freedom. In the initial period after maturity, to be sure, sexual desire is dampened by the moral admonitions of the cults with their proclamation of the sinfulness of sexual intercourse. This sinfulness, combined with physical satiety and psychic revulsion, produces a "moral hangover"; however, such considerations and feelings are soon overcome. As in eating, so in their love life, the Pangwe know no moderation. They empty the cup of joy to the lees. Later on, especially when the Pangwe has acquired several wives, he tends to develop a more business-like attitude towards sexual love, in place of the youthful amours which alternate unsteadily between ungoverned passion and its aftereffects, psychic unease.

In view of this extensive free love, it goes without saying that the virginity of his future wife plays no role in the man's choice. Indeed, the presence of a hymen (ajôdebâ) is usually scarcely noticed and /254/ to some is totally unknown. Around the age of 15 years it is supposed to be destroyed by boys of the same age.

As for their libidinal drive, the girls are generally not inferior to the boys. However, we may say that for the girls potency alone is as a rule the deciding factor in the choice of a friend. This fact is well expressed in the various dance songs at the Mbala (which, incidentally, were brought to the Fang and Ntum by the sexually loose Jaunde) as, for example, in the following complaint.

no more than a mere conventional taboo, as with certain words considered crude in French. At birth and until weaning a baby is *nyem* (*nkem*) or *nkeñeñ*.

After weaning, which usually occurs when the child begins to walk by itself, between eighteen months and two years, the *nkem* becomes a *mongô* (*mone fam* • boy; *mone minga* • girl). An uncircumcised boy is called more specifically *mbôlî*.

Circumcision takes place between eight and twelve years of age (1), before the first premonitory signs of puberty, especially the

1. In former times it was sometimes put off until the youth had killed his first enemy. See Trilles (no. 166) and Largeau (no. 48).

appearance of the first pubic hair (*afañ*, related to the verb *kañ* • to do well, correctly, on purpose, from the masculine root FA?). The circumcised boy, *nyi'an*, "cut one," becomes an adolescent, *mbômam*, a term also meaning "son" (in relation to a man, see above, p. 62). Correspondingly, a pubescent girl becomes *ngon* (which can mean at the same time young girl, daughter of a man, or moon: *nyeme ngon*, "to see the moon," that is, to be menstruating), or also *ñamam*. /57/

The adolescent boy is still *bôn*, uninitiated. The missions have now adopted the term *mvôn*, "initiated," to denote church members. Formerly, one became *mvôn* after initiation, mostly in the great national *ngi* initiation, the members of which were called *mvomvôñ* (probably "child of the death /*la mvor*/ of the *ôñ*"; compare this with the joking relationship *awuñ* • the dying /*la mvorir*/ of the *ôñ*).

After initiation, that is, somewhere between the sixteenth and twentieth year, a young man though of military age was not yet a *nye mbôñ*, a true person. This he became only upon marriage, when he attained what might be considered his legal, civil, even economic, majority.

A girl, *ngon*, who became *ngol* or *nye ngol*, a true woman, by losing her virginity, after marriage was *nye minga*, a /married/ lady, and *ñolo* or *ñom*, a matron, when she had brought up her first children. A man with grandchildren was *nnolo mbôt*, an elder, usually around forty; this was the highest possible social position. Indeed,

7: Trilles--70 M-5 (1893-1912) 1912 FH9 Fang FH9

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"fruit" that might result from transgressing the prohibition. The fault, nsem, must be expiated ritually as a fault, but the law would not consider the child as "bad" or guilty; the law does not take it into account at all, but ignores it: the child is "outside the law," res nullius, and is not killed but left to die. It is therefore important that they be really first fruits. Then, too, when the appointed time comes, when a Fan begins to feel himself ready to procreate in his turn, when he can take his place along with the young warriors, the sacrifice will be performed with all formality; once this has been accomplished, [530] but only then, will the prohibition be lifted. The sacrifice ought to be not only carried out but accepted too, because if, for one reason or another -- and this happens -- after circumcision has been performed according to the rules, the practitioner still considers that the spirits of the real or totemic ancestors are not satisfied, an additional sacrifice will be necessary in order to make the first acceptable.

Thus it is clear in what ways our notion of circumcision differs considerably from that of Mgr. Le Roy. In his opinion, it consists of the lifting of a prohibition in the interest of the family's moral welfare a "use permit," that must be bought back by a sacrifice; in our opinion, in agreement with Father Lagrange's, the lifting of the prohibition is not the cause but a natural consequence. The prohibition's objective is circumcision, the "use permit" is the inevitable result, not the cause, of the sacrifice, and circumcision (1) is the very sacrifice of the

1. Lagrange, Études sur les religions sémitiques [Studies in Semitic Religion], "Le Sacrifice" [Sacrifice"], pp. 255 ff.

procreative first fruits, the most important act from the point of view of clan unity and the perpetuation of the family.

II. Initiation

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The second totemic rite that we come upon in the life of a Fan youth is his initiation.

This rather complicated rite includes, first, the tests I have already mentioned, which make a warrior of the young man, then initiation into the rites, and finally the consecration of weapons.

The young warrior's years of childhood and adolescence have been entirely carefree and completely outside any religious cult. He may have just been taught the name of his personal totem, and perhaps not even that. All he knows is that he is forbidden under rather severe penalties to do certain things, to eat certain kinds of food. He observes these prohibitions rigidly, because he is sure that any infringement will be immediately punished, for isolated *ékí* are never pardoned and must always be expiated. [531]

a) Tests

When he has reached the age for taking his place among the warriors, a young man has first of all to undergo tests designed to show his strength and courage. Severe as they may be very few youths evade them. Besides, it would mean utter dishonor, and the young man who out of weakness or cowardice is either overcome by or doesn't dare face them, would have no choice but to exile himself. This does happen, though rarely, and especially among those few young people who have grown up from childhood as servants of the Europeans. The Fan stigmatize them by a special phrase meaning "men-women good-for-anything," and this expression tells a great deal about the special role they play and the peculiar morals of too many Europeans.

b) Initiation into rites

After he has passed these preliminary tests, a young man undergoes totemic initiation along with initiation into the ancestor cult. He is first taught the name of the family, clan and tribal totem. For this purpose, on a day chosen as favorable by the practitioner during the initiation already described above, the candidate is conducted in front of a sort of platform covered with dry leaves. First of all, the head of the family brings his *évuru bíðri*, which, as we know, encloses the ancestral skulls and the materialized totem. The neophyte will learn to distinguish the various objects and to identify the different skulls without a moment's hesitation being permitted.

Only then will he be allowed to know about the laws and rights of the totem. He will then receive his personal totem, as we have described it, will make it the prescribed sacrifice, and will preciously keep the remains of this offering on his own person, enclosed in an antelope horn. Already as a child he wore this horn which now contain the ashes of this sacrifice; it used merely to hang around his neck on a cord or, more often, before his genital organs. After the youth becomes a warrior, he hangs the horn among the other fetishes attached to a leather baldrick which crosses his chest and is hardly ever taken off. [532]

c) Consecration of weapons

A youth's childhood ends after the initiation. A whole new era opens up before him, an era of work and fighting and also of quite different pleasures from those of childhood. He is henceforth admitted to a place among warriors after these painful initiations the proof and marks of which are slashes cut into the back of his neck. Henceforth he may carry a gun; as a boy he had often tried to fire one so as to be ready when the time came. As a warrior with the right to fire it and to go to war, he must first "dedicate" the rifle to a spirit so that he may always shoot straight.

For an African all objects whatever they may be, have a life of their own; therefore, a rifle is a being. Alive with its own life, it will be dedicated to the spirit with the influence most favorable to it, that is, in the realm of space the sun, whose light and whose clear rays will enable it to hit the mark every time and will at the same time dissipate the shadows so that they will fail to conceal the enemy it is aimed at. The weapon will be dedicated to the sun and also to the clan's totemic guardian; in battle it is indeed important to be able to distinguish enemy from friend and not to run the risk of committing a totemic sacrilege. The rifle must be dedicated to both the totem and the sun.

However, it is worth noting that if nowadays a rifle is the only weapon to be dedicated, it is because it has become the

779 principal weapon and because there are very few Fan who do not
•184 possess one. Actually, the word for "rifle" in the consecration
411 song mentioned below is sometimes nzali, which really means
"gun," and sometimes mbène, which denotes the "crossbow."
The crossbow used to be the Fan national weapon. One of the
words has changed, but the song is no less ancient for that.

In the middle of the village, the young man, accompanied by an older friend, places his rifle so that the first rays of the rising sun will strike it; he arranges around the rifle his totemic fetishes, that is, his childhood totem, which he will hereafter abandon, and his new warrior totem. In order to cast a spell [533] on his rifle, he then performs the necessary incantations, 533 among them a hymn or invocation to the sun, of such real beauty and poetic quality that it should be quoted here.

539

Hymn to the Sun

Sun, you who see all things,
You, whose radiant splendor
Pierces the dark mist,
Sun, to you this homage!

To you, sun, king of the sky, divine hunter,
Sun, to you this homage!

Before your flashing glance
And the swift arrows of your fiery quiver,
Into somber depths
Fearful night sinks aghast,
Beneath your blows sparkling with light,
You tear night's mantle,
A black cloak trimmed with fire,
Sprinkled with bright stars,
You tear night's black mantle.

Sun, you who see all things,
You, whose radiant splendor
Pierces the dark mist,
Sun, to you this homage!

T79 When the required offerings have been made, before the
884 rifle is lifted, the actual consecration takes place. The tune and
841 words seem to me sufficiently remarkable to warrant quotation.
533 This song, in its melody and structure, recalls the antique airs which have come down to us from the Greeks and Romans. It is always sung by several voices:

539

Song of the Rifle

Anthem: Oh, all of you, listen, listen to the song,
the song of the rifle!
Chorus: Oh, let us all listen, listen to the song,
the song of the rifle!
Solo: For you, alone, O rifle! for you alone,
Far into the woods,
Far, far have I tramped long in the forest,
No longer hearing the barking dogs,
No longer hearing them,
No more than the noise-loving cocks,
No more than the cocks,
Leaving behind the chattering women,
Leaving them in their dark huts. [534]
Refrain: Yes, for you alone, O my rifle!
For your sake only, into the woods,
Into the woods have I gone,
O my rifle, for your alone.
Anthem: All of you, come, listen to the song of the fetish,
The beloved song of the fetish!
Chorus: Let us all come, listen to the song of the rifle,
The beloved song of the rifle! (Refrain: Yes,
for you alone ...)
Anthem: Come all of you, come, listen well and without noise,
Listen!
Chorus: And silently, heedfully, let us listen.
Solo: For you alone, O rifle! for you alone,
Deep in the woods,
Leaving the village behind,

The young man is armed. He has undergone the initiation of the bawu and henceforth he has a right to speak in the council. He will not take advantage of this until the day he brings in the hand of an enemy he has killed and he is able to testify to his bravery in the presence of all by this striking proof of a daring exploit, yet often carried out by surprise.

[*Pp.* 535-536, 18 lines of music.] [537]

III. Consecration of the Chief

a) The ceremony

A tribal chief has died. After the customary lamentation and funeral feast, he has been buried in a temporary grave. Thirty days afterwards the warriors again reassemble for the solemn funeral dance, the fanki. Then the eldest son, surrounded by leading warriors, opens his father's grave, climbs down beside the corpse, and with the consecrated knife detaches the skull, which will soon be added to the skulls of earlier ancestors in the évora biéri. Then the corpse is carefully replaced in the grave, and the totemic sacrifices are completed. We shall go back to these sacrifices when discussing individual mortuary rites. The eldest son or the heir removes the akaméyòn or tribal totem, if he has not already done so. He then throws the earth back onto the corpse and everyone helps him in this dismal task, after he has thrown the first handfuls. All these rites belong to the social mortuary ceremonial.

The new chief returns to the village. Then begins strictly speaking, the totemic rite of consecration, which takes place at night, without any female observers.

Escorted by all the warriors, to the beating of a tom-tom, the chief takes the évora biéri containing the ancestral skulls and carries it into the forest. The ceremony is secret only as regards women; young boys may be present.

The box of skulls is put on a sort of platform made of newly cut poles. These must come from a special tree, the éfufuve, and must all be alive and green. A bit of dead wood